



WISEWOMAN

Success Story 6 Partnership Provides Nicotine Replacement Therapy to Vermont Women Who Need It Most

Location Vermont

Focus Help uninsured and underinsured women quit smoking by referring them to the state's Quit Line and to the QuitBucks program, which provides coupons for free nicotine replacement therapies.

Strategy The Vermont WISEWOMAN program, *Ladies First*, partnered with the Vermont Tobacco Control Program (TCP) to make sure all *Ladies First* members have access to QuitBucks coupons, regardless of insurance status.

Early Successes By collaborating with TCP, *Ladies First* staff avoided duplicating other smoking cessation programs. TCP is recognized as expert in communicating with low-income Vermont citizens about the importance of quitting smoking, and *Ladies First* was able to capitalize on that expertise. All *Ladies First* members now have access to QuitBucks coupons and free nicotine replacement therapy.

Next year *Ladies First* plans to screen 2,700 women. If the smoking rate in this group is similar to the rate among Vermont women overall, approximately 510 low-income underinsured Vermont women could benefit from this collaborative program.

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Partnership Provides Nicotine Replacement Therapy to Vermont Women Who Need It Most

In October 2002 the Vermont WISEWOMAN program, *Ladies First*, published an article about smoking cessation in its award-winning magazine *Women's Matters*, now titled *Healthier You*. The quarterly magazine, published by the Vermont Department of Health, provides 4,500 *Ladies First* members with important program and screening information and examples of how other *Ladies First* members have made changes to their lives that make them feel better and live heart healthy lives. The article promoted the state's Quit Line and its QuitBucks program, which provides eligible Vermont citizens with coupons for free nicotine replacement therapies, such as the patch, gum, or lozenges. At that time, the only people eligible for QuitBucks were those who were uninsured or had Medicare or the Vermont Health Access Plan (VHAP), a state health plan for low-income residents. All *Ladies First* members qualify as low-income, but some have private insurance and are considered underinsured. The *Ladies First* staff wanted to make sure all *Ladies First* members would have access to the QuitBucks coupons, regardless of their insurance status.

To ensure that all *Ladies First* members, uninsured and underinsured, would have access to the QuitBucks coupons, *Ladies First* partnered with the Vermont Tobacco Control Program (TCP). The two programs already had a strong, established relationship. In the past, staff from TCP had contributed to *Women's Matters* by writing an article about smoking cessation. Most importantly, TCP is recognized for its expertise in communicating with low-income Vermont citizens about the importance of quitting smoking. By collaborating with TCP, *Ladies First* staff did not spend time creating a smoking cessation program that duplicated what the state offered. Instead they worked to ensure that QuitBucks coupons would be available to all low-income women, who are more likely than other women to smoke and to have overall poor health.

Barbara Moeykens, the TCP social marketing specialist, presented to the chief of the Vermont TCP the concept of expanding QuitBucks coverage to all *Ladies First* members, regardless of insurance status. She pointed out that *Ladies First* shared TCP's goal of helping low-income women. She also explained that both programs would miss the chance to serve this population if a change in policy was not made.

"By expanding QuitBucks coverage to all *Ladies First* members, regardless of insurance status, we estimated that approximately 510 women could potentially benefit from this policy change," she noted. The TCP chief decided that the benefits of the proposal outweighed the costs. She then took this recommendation to the Vermont Health Commissioner who approved the proposal to allow all *Ladies First* members to be eligible for QuitBucks.

To receive the QuitBucks coupons, *Ladies First* members must either call the state's toll-free Quit Line or speak to a local tobacco cessation coordinator (one is located at each Vermont hospital). Women are required to participate in counseling to receive the coupons.

The QuitBucks program has made a difference for women like Brenda (see Success Story 1 on page 11). A smoker for 20 years, Brenda has been smoke-free since April 2004. She relies on a low-dose patch to help curb her urge to smoke—and on the coupons that help cover her costs. "The QuitBucks money has made a big difference to me. I do not qualify for any help like Medicaid, but I still have bills to pay that are bigger than my paycheck."

Importance of Success

All *Ladies First* members now have access to free nicotine replacement therapy. Next year, *Ladies First* plans to screen 2,700 women. If the smoking rate in this group is similar to the rate among Vermont women overall, 510 low-income, underinsured Vermont women could benefit from this collaborative program.

Lessons Learned

- Strengthen your smoking cessation program by collaborating with other programs to avoid duplicating services that help women quit smoking.
- Look for ways to capitalize on the expertise of other programs that communicate successfully with your target audience.
- Question public health policies that can prevent women from receiving smoking cessation services. Advocate for making services available to WISEWOMAN participants, and be prepared to educate decision-makers about why these services are necessary.

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**—Barbara Moeykens
Social Marketing Specialist
Vermont Tobacco Control Program**